2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

and settled where another village already existed.[1] In both forms, this new settlement was called the *lusungulu* village, 'the one which goes in front'; and the village which was left was known as the *gogo* village. This use of the term *gogo* (literally 'grandparent') for house and village had a common basic connotation. It expressed the concept of being left behind to look after something, the *gogo* house being passed over for the heir to the Paramountcy or chieftainship but charged with ritual and ceremonial duties; and the *gogo* village being left behind to take care of the traditions and generally also of most of the widows of the deceased Paramount or chief. Each *lusungulu* village eventually divided on the death of its owner, part 'going forward' with the new successor, part remaining behind. The main groups in the village which went ahead or which remained were the houses connected with the new Paramount or chief or *mulumuzana* and those connected with his dead father. In the chapter on houses (Chapter III, Part III) this process will be examined in greater detail.

The third related institution was the provision for guarding the spirit of a dead Paramount or chief and those of some leading *alumuzana*. A senior woman was always guardian of such a spirit and in her hut were kept the ritual objects: spear, wooden dish, baskets, fire-stick, which were used in sacrifices to the ancestors. The guardianship of the spirit of a dead Paramount was always associated with the village which had been his *lusungulu*. His corpse was buried on the edge of the kraal containing the cattle of the house where he had grown up, and this village became the *gogo* village associated with him, where his spirit was guarded in a hut, probably though not necessarily belonging to one of his widows. The recognition of such a woman guardian was a matter for selection and appointment, and was the responsibility of the senior men of the *gogo* house in that village in consultation with the senior men of the *gogo* house in the dead man's father's village. The concept of guarding the spirits of important men, and the means by which such guardianship was practised, will be more fully discussed in Part IV in connexion with the ancestor cult.

THE NGONI KINGDOMS AND AFRICAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS

In the final section of this chapter we shall look at the Ngoni kingdoms in their relationship to other African kingdoms and states such as those described in *African Political Systems*.[2] A methodological problem arises here. In this study a number of references are made to the Ngoni kingdoms in pre-European times, especially in connexion

[1] This form of the institution was found in densely populated areas and the incoming households dominated the original ones.

[2] Fortes, M., & Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (ed.). *African Political Systems*. O.U.P., 1940. pp. 9–23.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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ancestor cult in the head village of their clan. If they were asked 'How do you address the spirit (*teta idloxi*)?' they gave the names and genealogy of the former heads of the clan and their attributes if they were known. If they were asked 'Where do you address the spirits?' the reply was always in terms of a particular village where a certain spirit was guarded.

The occasions on which the Swazi clan ancestors were addressed and sacrifices made were in cases of sickness of an important member of the clan. It was sometimes suggested that there might be trouble in the clan villages for which prayer should be made to the clan spirits, but when pressed the only specific instance informants could give was when the cattle did not thrive. They repudiated immediately any idea of prayer to the clan spirits in cases of drought or epidemics in the clan villages since those troubles, wherever they occurred, could only be helped by the spirits of the Paramounts who were concerned with all the land and all its people.

The procedure followed in the clan head village was the same as that for addressing the spirits of the Paramounts. In that village a diviner was consulted, he named the spirit who should be addressed, a beast was sacrificed and prayers were made. This was the Ngoni pattern of the ancestor cult, and it was limited to the Swazi and some of the trans-Zambesi clans. Its correct observance required that combination of cattle, houses, and known genealogies which only the leading clans possessed.

The living and the dead

At times such as funerals, and when talking about the ancestor cult, the Ngoni often used the phrase: 'Death cannot cut life.' They believed that human spirits had a continued existence after death, and that this existence was related to the place where they had dwelt, the people who were of their family and clan, and the cattle which belonged to their house and village. This continued association was not an automatic process. It had to be assured by the correct performance of the burial rites, the observance of stages of mourning and the deliberate 'bringing back' of the spirit to the village where it would be guarded and honoured after the final mourning ceremony was over.

In the Ngoni funeral rites there were distinctive elements in the burial of those belonging to Swazi and trans-Zambesi clans. In handling the corpse the legs were bent and drawn up to the body and the arms folded and crossed each side of the neck, so that the corpse seemed to be sitting and holding its head in its hands. It was wrapped in the skin of a newly killed beast. In the central kingdom men and women of Swazi clans were wrapped first in a sheep-skin, with a cow-skin put over it. The grave was a circular pit, with a small side chamber or shelf where the body was placed in a sitting position, propped up with large stones and facing south-east to the ancestral homeland. Personal possessions, such as skins and shields and baskets, were either put in the grave or taken to be

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
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the group of those living relatives who had performed or were about to perform certain rites for the newly dead.

These rites were the stages of mourning laid down in the Ngoni funeral ritual. They were stages in which all adults took part, and they fulfilled the need to build up the future links with the spirit who had joined the ancestors and to bring together in common acts those from whom death had removed one of their number. The following text by one of the leaders of a Swazi clan in the central kingdom puts together briefly the successive stages of shaving, drinking beer, eating meat, singing war-songs, ritual cleansing and widow inheritance, and bringing back the spirit.

'If a man died, the second day they shave; after 5 or 6 months they shave again and cook beer. This means the widows must take off their white *zitambo* (head bands). After 12 months they take off their black *zitambo* and kill a beast to praise the spirit so that he may return to his house. This is also the time for inheriting the widows.

When they take off the white *zitambo*, the brother of the one who died takes sheep dung and sprinkles it in the houses where the widows are sleeping. At the same time the men wash their hands with cattle dung. The meaning of this is to tell the widows to cook food for the brothers of the dead man to send to them when they sit by the kraal. This they do before they can see them.

From the ritual witnessed at many funeral ceremonies, which never altered in its main elements, and from discussions with Ngoni informants, it was possible to gain some idea of Ngoni beliefs about the relation between the living and the dead. It was clear that the attitude of the living towards the dead was one of respect and honour, but not predominantly one of avoidance and fear as among some of the neighbouring tribes. The post-burial ritual culminated in 'bringing back the spirit' to the village, and we shall examine this further in the last chapter of this section. An observer was always conscious of a sense that people were waiting for the return of the spirit, which had to be planned for and carried out by the living. During the interval between the death and bringing back the spirit, it was said to be 'in the bush'. When asked where in fact the spirit was, the answer was always 'We do not know. How can we know?' They admitted that the life of the spirits was unknown to them, and there was evidence of a slightly uneasy relationship during this interval of waiting. When the spirit had been brought back and was being guarded by some woman appointed for that purpose, then it was once more near to the living and their cattle, and it could be addressed correctly. In the absence of any clear concepts about life in a spirit world, the Ngoni clung to the ritual by which they believed they could establish and maintain contact of a safe and respectful nature between the living and the dead.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

Cattle in the ancestor cult

The Ngoni, unlike the Swazi as described by Dr. Kuper,[1] had no clear ideas about the life after death as lived by their immediate ancestors with whom they had associated in their lifetime. They did not, as the Swazi did, picture them living somewhere surrounded with cattle and other familiar creatures and objects. The importance of bringing the spirit back (*ukubuyisa idlozi*) to the house where it would be cared for signified two main things for them. The first was the continuous association of the spirit of the dead with the living persons in the community to which he had belonged, through the individuals belonging to the house, the actual hut where the sacrificial vessels were kept, and the cattle which belonged to the house. The other significant point was that contact with the returned spirit, and through him with the spirits of more remote ancestors, could only be established in the village containing the cattle of the house to which the dead man had belonged.

We shall be examining some aspects of the ritual of addressing the ancestral spirits in a later chapter of this section. Here we shall establish three constituent parts of the ancestor cult in which cattle were essential links between those taking part in the cult and the spirits whom they addressed.

The first part was the group of ceremonies which took place at death, at the burial, at the first ritual shaving and at bringing back the spirit. A text by Lopati Nzunga (see Chapter IV, p. 200) illustrates how three parts of a beast—the skin, the kidney fat (*nseso*) and the gall bladder (*nyongo*)—were considered essential for Ngoni burial. It was interesting to find in Blantyre among educated Ngoni who were Christians and occupied clerical and commercial posts, that they had given up the cow-skin for wrapping the corpse and substituted a coffin. But they admitted confidentially that in most Ngoni funerals the use of the *nseso* and the *nyongo* was customary. After the burial the ritual shaving, shared in by all who attended the funeral, was accompanied by the killing of a beast and the consumption of its meat, though with no ritual significance beyond its association with the purification of the mourners and their integration as a group. From six to twelve months later the second shaving and the bringing back of the spirit was also accompanied by killing a beast and eating its meat. These ceremonies expressed the sense of loss felt for the human person who had died, the sorrow of the mourners, their successive acts of purification which served to bring them together, and the final bringing of the spirit to live among them again. As we have seen, each stage of the death and mourning rites was accompanied by the eating of a beast or the use of certain parts of a beast. The cattle of the house to which the dead person belonged were used to bury him or her, to strengthen the mourners, and to reintegrate the spirit with the living community.

[1] Kuper, H. *An African Aristocracy*, p. 186.

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

lack of appetite, forgetfulness, sweating. These manifestations could take place in childhood, around puberty, or when the man was fully grown, though the most usual age was in the late teens. The symptoms culminated in sharp pains and a prolonged collapse, and after that a deep sleep. It was then that the dreams came giving the man the assurance that he was henceforth a medium, and that through the spirit of his grandfather, or whoever was now appearing to him, he could communicate with the spirit world. At this time also he was told in dreams where to find medicines and what to do with them. A constant feature in the initiation of well known and accredited diviners was that they knew the name and identity of the spirit with whom they were in contact, and it appeared to be always someone related to them and most often their father's father.

As they returned to normality from an experience which was frightening in its intensity, it dawned on them that they now had to practise as a diviner, to make use of the powers which had come to them. There was evidence that they accepted this role with reluctance. Their relatives, when they saw them going through the earlier stages, were aware that there was an inevitable sequel, that of practising as a diviner, and they too shared the reluctance of the man himself. Sometimes a diviner began to practise by associating as a junior partner with a successful practitioner; sometimes he began hesitantly by himself. The criterion of the validity of their calling was their success. No one seemed to know what became of diviners who were unsuccessful and never became accredited. They apparently disappeared from the field because no one employed them.

The diviners whom I met and talked with, as well as those few whom I saw practising their calling, were considered by the Ngoni to possess a distinctive temperament. It was evident that they wished to live somewhat apart, and that they were withdrawn in a social as well as in a spatial sense. They married, but usually only one wife, and had children, but played little part in extended family or village affairs. Their huts were always on the outskirts of villages and were neither large and prosperous nor very poor looking. They had a reputation for being unpunctual and forgetful, but they were far from being unobservant. Part of their skill lay in watching people and learning about their concerns from observation and storing events in a good memory. Though they could work themselves up into emotionally excited states during a consultation, at other times they gave the impression of being controlled, rather quiet, detached, and uninfluenced by the currents of talk and opinion around them.

The rewards for their services were in kind as a rule, and could be articles of household equipment, food, cloth, and sometimes European clothes or goods from the stores, such as lanterns, soap, matches and cigarettes. There appeared to be no bargaining over payment. The

2: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1956
FR5 Ngoni FR5

769 771 UMkulumqango or other names for the High God were rare. When questioned they said that such a High God existed and the spirits knew him, but they, the living, did not. The Ngoni phrase, *asiyazi*, 'we do not know', and its Nyanja version, *sitingadziwa*, 'we cannot know', were constantly on their lips in discussions on this topic. Among Christians like Cibambo as well as non-Christians like Nzunga, their interest in the ancestor cult was part of maintaining their identity as Ngoni. The neighbouring tribes had other forms of ancestor cults but the Ngoni form brought from the south was distinctive, and many of the concepts and practices were known to the South-eastern Bantu peoples.

The ritual for a new ancestral spirit

761 775 The Ngoni believed that at the moment of death the spirit left the body. If a sick person fell into a coma and was unconscious for a long time they said that the person had died when the coma began even though they knew he went on breathing. This happened at the death of Bambo Manga when she had periods of unconsciousness before she died. They said that her spirit had left her at the beginning of the last long coma, even though they knew from her pulse and breathing that she was not dead. At the parting of the spirit from the body they had to care for both, in order that the new ancestral spirit might be happy and in the right relationship with the living. Equal importance was attached to caring for the spirit and to caring for the corpse, since the correct performance of ritual had deep significance for the dead and for the living.

763 775 When the spirit left the body it was believed to go to the bush at the outskirts of the village where the person had been accustomed to go to relieve himself. Between the death of Bambo Manga and the burial, each morning before it was light, the men marched with a dancing step up the path to the bush where she was wont to go, singing a war song dating from trans-Zambesi days which was sung at the sending out of the *impi*. Marching to the bush and singing the war song was one step in bringing the spirit back or, more correctly perhaps, keeping in touch with it so that it should not go too far away. This approach to the spirit between the death and burial was the first of three ritual acts, each called 'bringing back the spirit'. The other two occurred after the first and second ritual shaving.

764 The preparation of the corpse for burial has been described in the first chapter of this section. Those features of Ngoni burial were considered essential for the welfare of the spirit, and were carried out in the majority of funerals which I witnessed, whether the dead person was a Christian or not. An account of the burial of a leading *mulumuzana* in the northern kingdom who was a Christian, given to me by another Christian Ngoni and confirmed by some of the missionaries present at the funeral, emphasized all the distinctive Ngoni elements: the round

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

and the notched sticks were only an *aide-mémoire*, not a necessity. 211

The heavens and the earth

When the Pleiades appeared just before dawn they said the Pleiades were being 'reborn' (the word used for the new moon's appearance and for the initiation of a diviner), and that in this position in the heavens they were heralds of the cold season. They knew the relative positions of Venus as an evening star and a morning star, and watched for the appearance high in the heavens of Jupiter which they knew by its size. Orion they recognized as a man with a spear, a hunter, and the Milky Way as the sands of the sky, since sand was used to denote numbers which cannot be counted. 821

In announcing the death of a great chief by a messenger sent from village to village, the traditional formula was: 'Listen. Do you hear? The heavens have fallen.' Hence when earthquakes were felt, it was believed that some great chief had died, and the earthquake was the trembling when his spirit left the earth for the place of the departed spirits. If it turned out to be no one of their own people, they nevertheless held to the belief that somewhere, unknown to them, a 'great one' had died and his spirit had departed at the time of the earth's trembling. 763 775 823

Eclipses of the sun and moon they also connected with some great event either among their own people or elsewhere, and they used the eclipse year and month to date these events. Their famous crossing of the Zambezi on their northward march, finally and irrevocably cutting off their connexions with the south, was during a solar eclipse. In teaching young adults Ngoni history they said: 'When we crossed the Zambezi it became night at noon.' 821 [167]

A lunar eclipse, almost total, occurred when I was in a chief's village, and all the people were called to the kraal and stood watching it. Then the chief's spokesman, his 'mouthpiece', called for silence in the phrase used for a war summons [632]

6:Rattray E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

754 human flesh-eaters may have worn, the doctor takes
695 home with him and washes his poison bark with it,
791 that it may still retain its virtue. In the case of a man who dies from drinking the poison, his spirit is
● [715] not brought back to the village, but is driven out into the bush.

II

A FUNERAL

764 I. When a person dies every one is told that so and so, who was ill, is "finished for." Then the village elders come together and go into his hut. They begin to bathe the body and anoint it with oil, folding the knees against the chest, and laying the palms of the hands against the cheeks, the arms being bent from the elbows. Then they take a large flat stone, set it against the hut wall, and on it place the body in a sitting position. Then they commence to wail, the women folk only are in the hut where the corpse is, the men are outside, and the children on the verandah. They lament, saying, "Alas, alas, my husband, what shall I do this day?" [The women pass the night in the hut with the dead body, the men sleep outside.] Next morning, when it is dawn, some men take their hoes, and sacrificial flour, and go to some resting-place on the wayside, and sprinkle some flour at the foot of a tree, and set out again, and when now they are drawing near the burial ground, the one who is in front picks up a stone and throws it, with the words, "We have passed." Then they commence to clear a piece of ground, and take the flour and mark out the grave.

6:Rattray/E, G-5 (ca. 1900) 1907 FR5 Ngoni FR5

764 and take a large flat stone and set the corpse on it, and take a millstone and place it on his head. If it be he has children, they are made to take charcoal in their hands, and this they cast into the grave (this is to cause them to forget). Then some old man takes up a hoe, and strikes the ground at one side of the grave and again at the other, when many begin to fill in the earth, the chief mourners trampling it down.

III. When they have finished filling in, they knock out the hoe heads, and set off for the stream. They who carry the hoes and household belongings of the deceased go first. When they reach the water, the chief mourners bathe first, then every one else; the men bathe up-stream, the women down-stream. They do not rub each other's backs. When
768 they have finished bathing, they take the calico, sporran, and "*nsengwa*" baskets the dead man used to eat out of, and set fire to them, and splash the ashes with water. Then they set out for the village, wailing. When they come to the grave, the
● [765] medicine man looks for medicine to remove the evil influence of the spirit of the dead; [this medicine] he breaks up, puts in a potsherd, pours on water, and stirs. The chief mourner begins to rub it on his
765 legs, face, and hands, then others come and do the same. If the deceased had children of his own, they also rub some of the medicine on. They again keep wake at the hut in which the man died. Next morning at dawn the nearest relation of the dead
[431] takes goats and fowls and gives them to the chief mourners, who then begin to shave a little patch of hair from the side of each person's head, when the people will then shave each other quite bald. The widows go to some spot in the bush to weave the "red" bands and to shave. When every one has quite finished shaving, the meat is taken from the

7: Hodgson G-5 (1926) 1933 FR5 Ngoni

842 otherwise *mdulo* of the child will still result. Medicine is taken also by women who are unable to conceive. If it fails, it is because a spirit has entered the womb; and lots are taken to find whose spirit it is, after which sacrifices are offered until the desired result is obtained.

8. *Dissolution of Marriage* (*Chewa*).

586 The Achewa have no form of legal separation by agreement, and a divorce can be effected only where adequate reason exists. A husband may not divorce his wife on account of barrenness; but he may divorce her for adultery or desertion; or if she persistently neglects to cook food, bring water or perform her other work; or if she is offensively and perpetually jealous. A wife may divorce her husband if he is impotent; or if he fails to maintain a habitable house, or to do his share of the work; or if he fails to pay her tax, feed and clothe her properly; or on account of desertion or ill-treatment. Effect is given to the divorce after the hearing of the case by the husband handing over a fowl or other token, always known as *mubvi*[1] (an arrow), in the presence of the *anakhoswe* to the wife's father, who passes it on to her *mtsibweni*.[2] The wife always keeps the children, even if she has been at fault; though sometimes in very flagrant cases one or more fully-grown children may be awarded to the husband; and in adultery the co-respondent is obliged to pay heavy damages as compensation for the loss of the children, and the value of several years' tax is refunded by the *mtsibweni*. A woman may not be divorced while she is pregnant.

[684]

9. *Marriage of Widows* (*Chewa*).

587 A widow may not be courted until after the conclusion of the funeral ceremonies described in Section VII. When, a few months later, she has to make her choice, she brews beer at her own house, and on the evening of the *tsiku losakumbula* her suitors, friends and relations forgather outside; the eldest female relation holds before her pieces of (*tsekwa*[2]) grass, and tells her which of the suitors each piece represents. Then she signifies her choice by taking the appropriate piece in her hand; and the old woman proceeds to the house of the chosen one, selects therefrom a knife or other small article, and hands it to the widow. In due course the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, brings a cow, sheep, goat or fowl, according to his means, and ties it to the centre post of the widow's house, in order to get rid of the spirit of her late husband; otherwise, he will not be able to beget a child. The widow brings out beer; her relations subsequently remove the animal from the centre post, and at night the bridal pair sleep apart in the house. Next day they procure medicine from a doctor and put it in a big pot in the house; and in the evening first the man and then the woman bathes in it. That night they again abstain from conjugal intercourse; but at cockcrow, after bathing a second time in the pot, they take it outside the village to a place where two paths meet, and break it there, thus finally and completely ridding themselves of the spirit of the first husband. They return to the village before it is light, and then commence their married life.

[775]
[842]

[1] Cf. H. S. Stannus, *Journ. Roy. Anthrop. Inst.*, 1910, vol. xl, p. 309.
[2] *Tsekwa*, a long coarse grass used for thatching.

7: Hodgson G-5 (1926) 1933 FR5 Ngoni FR5
Maravi FR4

cases, *lalulu* may begin to dance on the day of interment, and *kadyankhazi* dances near the grave, while *hang'wing'wi* dashes out into the villages with a stick, kills two or three fowls, runs with them to the *dambwe*, roasts them there, and takes them to the people who are digging the grave. In the early morning of the third day, the women sweep the hut and burn the rubbish outside; men and women then bathe as before, and most of the friends depart; but the near relations, male and female, shave their heads and sleep at the hut.

On the fourth morning the *dambwe* is swept up, and the performers bathe, the figures having been destroyed overnight. The near relations must still remain and sleep at the hut. During this period, all who sleep at the hut must abstain from sexual intercourse; should anyone have intercourse, he must cease to sleep at the hut, or he will *dula* the other (*vide* II, 1). On the fifth day all go away, and the widow sleeps alone in the house. During the next week or two, and sometimes even longer, she must not talk except when absolutely necessary, nor may she wash any part of her person except her mouth.

After the death of a headman or other important personage,[1] it is necessary to recall the spirit which has departed to the base of a tree in the bush; and beer is therefore made by the widow when a month or so has elapsed. On the *tsiku lachyumbula* (*vide infra* IX, 1) all those who have assisted at the interment gather outside the house and drink. Later, in the evening, two of the deceased's elderly male relations go into the bush with two *nsengwa* baskets, into one of which they put a *chisulwi* (species of caterpillar), afterwards placing the baskets in the house at the head of the bed. The caterpillars are eaten in due course by the ubiquitous small *nyuvwe* ant; but the spirit remains, and the widow presents periodical offerings of beer and porridge, invoking him by his clan name (*kwonga chikwongo chake*), *e.g.* "Yo Banda! Yo Banda!" Anything left by the spirit is given to the children next morning. The Angoni keep the spirit by making a small fence round the *nsengwa*, but the Achewa consider this unnecessary. On the *tsiku lakumwa* all bathe together in the stream and drink beer at the house. Next day the first offering to the spirit is made by the widow, and the relations may disperse.

4. *Memorial Rites* (*Chiwa*).

After an interval of two or three months, when they have had time to collect food, money and other presents, a *vinjwa* dance is held by way of memorial. If two men die in the same village at the same time, the funeral rites described above may be held for the two jointly; but each must have his own memorial separately. The dance is arranged by the *mwini malivo* and lasts three days. The relations are now permitted to look on. There is no beer; and generally not more than four or five *mikhwala* perform each day. On the first evening *njedza* always begins, but he receives no *masupo*, though the *mikhwala* and *visudzo* receive the usual presents. *Kasinja* performs about midnight, and dancing continues till cockcrow. On the second night *kasinja* always begins, and dancing is generally over by midnight. On the third night there is no particular order of precedence, and the figures are usually taken to the *dambwe*

[1] *Cf.* Stannus, *Journ. Roy. Anthrop. Inst.*, vol. xl, 1910, p. 300, on the Anyanja: "The spirits of the departed retain their former stations, thus the *mzimu* of a chief is a thing of greater account than that of an ordinary man. It is thought to continue to hold a directing influence on the well-being of the tribe."